Students Prepare for Momentous Flight

They've designed, calculated, built, tested, and analyzed.

July 16 students from Ohio and Wyoming will see the moment of truth for all their efforts when their rocket lifts off the launch pad at the NASA Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, Va.

The University of Cincinnati Pathfinder rocket is a student built, high performance rocket and payload. Through the project, students are gaining hands-on experience in every aspect of engineering and launching a reliable and reusable rocket.

Roger Rovekamp, Pathfinder project lead and project manager of the Cincinnati team, said, "I learned how to manage a project with minimal funding, varying levels of commitment and strict design requirements, as well as how to design, build, test and launch a high powered sounding rocket."

Rovekamp graduated in May 2003 from the University of Cincinnati and is now a project engineer with Lockheed Martin Space Operations, Houston. He said, "My position with Lockheed requires effective communication and team coordination skills, as well as project management skills. This project has certainly improved those skills beyond anything the classroom could have given me."

Students from the University of Cincinnati designed and built the payload. They worked in conjunction with Casper College, Natrona County School District and Wickman Propulsion and Space, all in Wyoming, in the design and fabrication of the motor.

NASA is supporting the project through the Sounding Rocket Program's Student Rocket Flight Demonstration Initiative. The initiative is designed to give universities the opportunity to fly student designed rockets in a safe and controlled environment. NASA Wallops is providing design consultation, launch range and safety support.

The Pathfinder rocket is expected to fly to an altitude of about 30,000 feet. The rocket booster and payload will be recovered after landing in the Atlantic Ocean approximately five miles offshore from Wallops Island.

The rocket is 8 inches in diameter and about 19 feet in length with an estimated weight of 328 pounds.

The launch window for the mission is 5:45 to 8 a.m., EDT, July 16. The launch backup day is July 17.

The launch will be web cast on the internet at:
www.wff.nasa.gov/webcast

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